

Letter from OSHO



By Taleta McDonald

On July 27th 1984, before I could even read, I received a letter from Rajneeshpuram, which contained a mala and a typed letter from Osho's personal secretary, Ma Anand Sheela, which read:

“Let this be the foundation of your sannyas: playfulness has to be the colour you dye your whole being in; let it vibrate through each fiber and cell of your being.”

The letter contained my new name, Shanti and from that day onwards, my parents, who followed the teachings of an enlightened Indian guru called Osho, immersed me into listening to Osho satsangs and I was brought up within the Indian yogic philosophies of meditation and mindfulness.

Ultimately, at the young age of four, before I could even grasp what yoga really was, my

childhood upbringing put me on the path of yoga.

My school age years were a disaster as I felt so different compared to the other children, who would often tease me for turning up to school wearing my mala and the colour red and after experiencing severe anxiety, my parents eventually home schooled me.

I can thank my parents now for the upbringing they gave me, however, it wasn't until many years later that I adopted an asana practice.

I always felt a stirring in my heart and an inner longing to try a yoga class and although it was often on my new years resolution list of things to do, I didn't adopt a regular asana practice until my sister introduced me to a few postures back in 2013 and from that day onwards, I was hooked.

Suddenly I was spending my days and nights balancing on my head and contorting my body in ways that I never thought was possible while running on a yoga high- those who practice will know this term!

One year of regular self-practice quickly passed and I began to really question who I was and what I was here on earth to do.

Up until then, I was living a secure and safe life in a nice cliff top inner city house, which contained my life's hard earned possessions, beautiful furniture and all the 'things' to make my life comfortable. I was engaged to my partner and planning my wedding, my first article had just been published and my career in freelance journalism was looking promising.



However, despite having a lot externally, none of it made me truly happy and I could no longer ignore the feeling of wanting to do something completely different with my life.

I hit rock bottom, shattering into a thousand tiny pieces and in that moment I had an aha moment that would be the most important turning point in my life.

I decided I no longer wanted to live in a house in Auckland City so armed with trust and faith; I sold, gifted and donated all of my possessions to charity. I also knew I no longer wanted to be in a relationship with my fiancé, so I ended it and I lived in my campervan, with only my dog for company.

For 6 months, I freedom camped around the North Island and I lived very basic, often showering in cold public showers and hand-washing what little clothes I had left, in a bucket.

In a matter of days I went from living in a house, to suddenly finding myself homeless and living alone in a van with no material possessions!

During this time of intense solitude, I delved deeper into my yoga practice but with no room inside a house, I would often practice on the beach or in parks, which connected me even more to the sacred rhythms of mother earth, where the stars and the moon became my nightly entertainments.

I had fallen off the familiar path of society, far from my old life in inner city suburbia and into something entirely new. I learned to listen to the subtle signs of the universe, which was continuously guiding me along an unfamiliar path, which felt so foreign to me. I lived simply and not having access to things like power, Internet, television or



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people, which are often used as distractions, gave me the opportunity to awaken to who I really was, beyond societal and familial conditioning.

Within this new space of awareness, I realized I had a passion for yoga and I wanted to become a teacher so I could share it with others so I booked my flight to India and armed with only a backpack and the desire to learn and have an authentic yoga experience at the root source, a daily sweat inducing Mysore style practice beneath the intense heat of the goan sun and what felt like a thousand chaturangas, led me to complete my 200-hour yoga teacher training course, in South Goa.

My heart was happy knowing that I had finally found my calling and I was on the right path, but I wanted to see more of India so I set off on a pilgrimage of self-discovery where I visited 21 towns and seven states via train, plane, bus, elephant, rickshaw, taxi and motorbike.

I can remember walking barefoot into Jama Masjid, India's largest mosque, which sits watch over Old Delhi, and as I looked out over the corrugated iron roofs of shanty towns, I felt so grateful to be born into a country of relative wealth and privilege, whereas so many in India lived in poverty and didn't have the opportunities that I was fortunate enough to have.

I then went across town to Laxminarayan Temple, a sprawling Hindu temple located in the heart of New Delhi, which was adorned with shrines dedicated to Lord Shiva, Ganesh and Hanuman and it contained beautiful statues of Lord Narayan and the Goddess Lakshmi.

Seeing the contrast between Old and New Delhi made me think about inequality and how the gap between rich and poor here was so evident, unlike in New Zealand where the working class poor live in modest homes, but behind closed doors, they struggle to; eat, pay their bills, provide for their children and



they are merely in survival mode.

India was having a deep effect on me and everywhere I looked, I was given the opportunity to reflect on my life and the world around me.

A day later, I found myself mesmerized and in a trance like state, while watching the orange hues of the sunrise, glistening against the white marble walls of one of the most beautiful structures in the world, the majestic Taj Mahal.

In that moment, I truly felt blessed to be alive, even though I had nothing left to return to in New Zealand.

I ventured onto Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan, where I received an impromptu blessing from an old sadhu who was feeding monkeys on a hilltop, which overlooked the Pink City.

Although there were no words exchanged and we were of a different skin colour, I felt we spoke the same language and we were essentially one, where the soul knows no boundaries.

The further I went, the more my heart opened and I eventually found myself in Rishikesh, where I dipped my feet into the holy waters of mother Ganges while listening to the intoxicating songs during Ganga Aarti (a religious ceremony, which is held at the end of each day, with singing, chanting, music

and the lighting of candles) at Parmath Niketan during the most spectacular sunset that I've ever seen.

The following day I climbed a dizzying 3050 metres up to Surkanda Devi Temple, an auspicious Hindu temple perched high up on a hilltop, which provided my first glimpse of the snowcapped peaks of the Himalayas.

My heart instantly melted, and I yearned to be closer. That was the beginning of my love affair with the Himalayas.

A few days later I visited the home of the 14th Dalai Lama in the largely Tibetan town of Daramshala, and I quietly watched the monks go about their daily duties while soaking up the peaceful vibes within the monastery.

The last town I ended up visiting was the most polluted yet. The Punjab city of Amritsar, with its deafening traffic noise and chaotic streets filled with cars, people, rickshaws, motorbikes and cows all trying to maneuver around each other from different directions, was a stark contrast from the quiet mountainside village of upper Daramshala. I managed to find The Golden Temple amidst the chaos and as I sat at the sacred pool of nectar (the large water tank that is thought to hold healing powers) that surrounded Sikh's holiest temple, I found peace amongst all of the people.

India had weaved a magic spell on me and as I boarded my plane for Nepal, I knew I



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would return again someday.

I spent my last week in a luxurious guest house perched high on a hilltop in Pokhara, which overlooked the snow capped Himalayas before returning home to New Zealand, only to find out I had narrowly escaped the April earthquakes, which hit only two days after I left.

My angels must have been looking out for me, however, I was left with the desire to return, so I followed my heart back to Nepal and I lived for half a year adopting a Hindu culture and living with a Nepalese family in the middle of Kathmandu, during a humanitarian crisis.

Living in such extreme and challenging conditions forced me to find solace within and I continued to delve deeper into my yoga practice. I managed to find beauty amongst the poverty and it was then that I found my yoga teacher.

Receiving one to one lessons from an authentic yoga master was a turning point for me in my practice. He gave me an invaluable lesson into the true essence of yoga, which is a lot more than doing yoga postures in a typical western-based class that people often only attend for a physical workout.

This experience ignited within me a desire to spread the ancient teachings of the 8-limb path and teach a more holistic form of yoga that is in alignment with the lessons that I had received from all of my teachers, including the ones whom I had met spontaneously, during my yoga pilgrimage throughout India and Nepal.

Two years of traveling and I have finally returned home to New Zealand, after living briefly in Australia.

If anything, the past two years has taught me to have trust in the universe and faith in my journey and stripping away everything that was previously my life has given me the opportunity to reconnect with my authentic self, so that I could find my soul calling and realize what it was that I really wanted to manifest in my life, rather than just being on automatic replay and going through the motions of an unfulfilled life.

I have learned to let go and surrender with where the flow of life wants to take me, rather than resisting or trying to control the outcome and in the process, I have become much lighter, content, happy and free.

If I could give one piece of advice to readers who may resonate with my journey: When you live in alignment with your true self, you become more energetically in tune with the higher vibrations of the universe and you will find that situations will magically appear to help you create the life you truly desire. The key is to take a giant leap into the unknown, despite feeling fearful!

Even though I have returned to New Zealand with no house, car, job or possessions, I have returned a much richer woman from when I had left, and as my childhood letter suggested, a more playful one!

